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NEW FORMAT

THE SANDMAN

MASTER of DREAMS

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SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS

THE ARCH
Who has his HEAD within
THE FIRST OF THE
ARE DANGLING
HANGING from the COAL-BLACK
JAWS — SO LOW
BUT THEIR NOT A WORD! — CASSIUS like a MERE
Who IS LARGE of Limb —
BUT NOT TOO LARGE
AND WHO MUST
SEEN THE WHOLE
REACHED THE
WITH PANTING BREATH

NEIL GAIMAN • KELLY FREAS • DAVE McKEAN

For the hundredth time since I regained it, I reach into the pouch and I touch the sand.

I sift it through my fingers.

Feel each grain of it, inexhaustible. Endless.

Like myself, like the few others of my kind. ENDLESS.

Tonight I feel alone.

I have always been solitary, but here on the nightward shores of dream, loneliness washes over me in waves, lapping and pulling at my spirit.

I watched him even then as he fell, his face undefeated, his eyes still proud.

It is time for me to walk the abyss. Time to reclaim my own.

I sprinkle sand into the waters of night. The grains burn as they fall, reminding me of another in times long passed away.

I must talk to the Morningstar.

I do not have high hopes for the meeting.

SANDMAN

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The Wind that blows between the Worlds chills me as I fall.

Suppose I fail?

I cannot bluff Demons, as I bluffed the errant dreams with Constantine.

But I have the pouch. I have a modicum of power.

I have hope.

And I stand here, alone and afraid, in the Naked Space...

...at the gate of Hell.

GONGGGGGGGGG

AUH! *MASTER!* THERE IS ONE AT THE DOOR! LORD *SQUATTERBLOAT! MASTER!*

THERE'S ONE AT THE DOOR, AT THE GATE TO DAMNATION...

IS IT THIEF, THUG OR WHORE? THERE'S ONE AT THE DOOR...

AND THERE'S ROOM FOR ONE MORE TILL THE END OF CREATION.

THERE'S ONE AT THE DOOR.

AT THE GATE TO DAMNATION. HHHUUUUHHH...

Greetings, Squatterbloat. I wish to talk to your master. Take me to him immediately.

OH *YES*, MY CLOWN? AND *WHO* MIGHT *YOU* BE?

I have many names. But I am the King of Dreams, of the Nightmare Realms... I seek Lord Lucifer. The Lord of hell.

SO WHERE'S YOUR *CROWN*?

Some demon has stolen it. I have come to Hell to get it back.

OH YES, MY CLOWN. YOU'RE NEW IN TOWN.

SO *WHERE'S* YOUR RUBY?

I will take no insults from you, little demon! Guard your tongue!

Lucifer will not be kind to one who insults an honored guest-- and I AM a guest in this realm, as I am the monarch of my own.

UHHN.

SPLOP!

CHUNNG!!

OH YES, MY CLOWN--AND *WHO* MIGHT *YOU* BE?

BACK TO YOUR GATE AND DUTY, SQUATTERBLOAT! *I'LL* TAKE THE DREAMLORD, PLAY HIS GUARDIAN...

FOR INNOCENTS ABROAD NEED GUIDES OF NOTE-- AND WHO NOTES MORE THAN ME...?

...THAN *ETRIGAN?*

Etrigan. Yes, Merlin's demon. The half-man. I remember you. So you're a rhymer now? You've risen in hell's hierarchy, I see.

THINGS CHANGE.

THIS WAY.

THINGS CHANGE ... IN EARTH *AND* HELL...

TO RISE AMONG THE FALLEN? STRANGE AND TRUE. BUT AS THINGS CHANGE, LORD, THEY TRANSMUTE AS WELL...

AND IF *I'VE* CHANGED, O KING, THEN WHAT OF *YOU*?

I have been ... absent ... for some time. But changed ...?

...ALL TOO MUCH. SANDRA KNEW EVERYTHING, AND THE PAPERS. SO I HAD TO. PILLS. PLASTIC BAG.

HAD TO GET OUT. NEEDED A BREAK. HURTING. HURTING.

The wood of suicides has changed since my last visit to hell. I remember it as a tiny grove.

SNAP

Perhaps.

...I THOUGHT THE HURTING WOULD **STOP**.

Now it resembles a forest.

HURTING HURTING HURTING HURTING HURT HURTING HURT HURT HURTING

Hell is changing.

Never trust a demon. He has a hundred motives for anything he does... Ninety-nine of them, at least, are malevolent.

KAI'CKUL! DREAMLORD! I HOPED ONE DAY YOU WOULD COME TO ME! *FREE* ME, MY LOVE! PLEASE?

I greet you, Nada. It... pains me to see you like this.

Etrigan...

"Etrigan, WHY did you bring me here?"

KAI'CKUL! FREE ME, LORD! *YOU* ORDERED ME CONFINED HERE! YOUR *FORGIVENESS* CAN *FREE* ME!

I IMPLORE YOU...

UPON YOUR RIGHT ARE SOULS, ENTOMBED, TO PITY. AN *UGLY* SIGHT...

DON'T YOU *LOVE* ME?

It has been ten thousand years, Nada.

...yes. I still love you.

"But I have not yet forgiven you."

NOW, ONWARD TO THE CITY! *HAHAHA HAHA!*

We do not talk for the rest of the journey to Dis, the hellcity.

Lucifer's palace. It, too, has changed. It echoes with loss and pain. The last time I came to this place it was as an honored guest, an envoy from my own kingdom.

This time I lack power, I lack my symbols of office.

But I am still DREAM, and the doors of the palace open as we arrive.

We travel to the summit, past vasty halls that echo of screams and grunts and sighs and dust.

Up stairs that run with sweet blood. At the top of his mansion he waits for us, alone.

Greetings to you, Lucifer Morningstar.

HELLO.

HELLO, DREAM.

ETRIGAN, PLEASE LEAVE US.

WE FEAR YOU WERE CAUGHT BY MORTALS, LIKE A NEWLY FLEDGED DEMON, SWEET MORPHEUS. WE EXPECTED *BETTER* OF YOU.

STILL. YOU ARE HERE NOW.

HAVE YOU COME TO JOIN FORCES? TO ALLY YOUR REALM TO OURS? TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE SOVEREIGNTY OF *HELL*?

You know my views on that, Lightbringer.

YES.

YES, WE DO. YOUR FAMILY ARE WELL, I TRUST? DESTINY, DEATH, DESPAIR AND THE OTHERS? NO MATTER. WE ASSUME THAT THIS IS NO SOCIAL CALL...

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

My helm was... stolen from me. I believe one of your demons has it. I would like it back.

NOW.

BZZT

AH, IF IT WERE *ONLY* THAT EASY. THINGS HAVE *CHANGED* IN HELL SINCE YOU WERE LAST HERE...

Things have changed? What are you trying to tell me, Lucifer Morningstar?

That you no longer rule hell? That the demons no longer follow your rule?

We have met. So you spoke the truth, Proud Lord of Lies. Hell is now a duumvirate.

Things do not change that much, proud one.

THIS IS OUR CO-MONARCH, *BEELZEBUB*. THE LORD OF FLIES.

AH, BBUT THEY *DO*, MMMORPHEUS.

LUCIFER ISZZ *INDEED* NO LONGER *SOLE* MMMONARCH OVV THE NEZZZER REGIONZZZZ...

BBBUT *NO*. IT'SZZZZ A TRIUMMMVIRATE.

AZAZEL WILL JOIN US SHORTLY. HE IS THE THIRD LORD OF HELL.

SOME YEARS AGO THE *DARK*, THE SHADOW CREATURE, CAME FORTH TO *CHALLENGE HEAVEN*. THE EPISODE ENDED IN... PERHAPS A STALEMATE.

BUT THE CIVIL WAR IN HELL THAT ENSUED TIPPED THE PRECARIOUS BALANCE OF *POWER*.

WE RULE IN *COALITION* NOW, *AZAZEL*, *BEELZEBUB* AND I.

THREE KINGS IN DARKNESS. I AM AZAZEL. WELL COME, DREAM KING.

Hell, a triumvirate? Things change indeed.

Very well. I seek a demon, who has stolen my helm of office. I wish it back.

I do not know the demon's name.

WHICH DEMON, ZZEN? ***NAME*** IT AND WE WILL BBBBRING IT HERE.

THERE ARE MORE THAN A MILLION DEMONS, AFTER ALL.

THEN LET US SUMMON **ALL** OF THEM TO TELL, AND ***MEET*** THEM ON THE VASTY PLAINS OF ***HELL!***

THERE. NOW, DREAM KING...

TELL US...

WHICH DEMON HAS YOUR HELMET?

I look at the demons. Some I recognize from nightmares. Others have passed through the dreamworld in the past. But there are so many...

One of you has my helm; my mask of pure dream. I crafted it myself, from the bones of a dead god. It is one of my tools...

Ah.

That one.

CHORONZON. A DUKE OF HELL. ONE OF BEELZEBUB'S.

WELL, CHORONZON. DOES DREAM SPEAK *TRULY*? DO YOU INDEED HAVE HIS MASK OF OFFICE?

SSSS. WHAT IF I *HAVE*?

YOU MAY NOT TALK TO US THAT WAY, CHORONZON.

HAVE YOU THE HELMET?

YES, LORDS.

SSSS. I *TRADED* IT FROM A *MORTAL* FOR A PALTRY THING, BUT IT WAS A *FAIR* TRADE.

I HAVE BROKEN NONE OF THE *LAWS* OF *HELL*. IF YOU WANT YOUR *PRECIOUS* BACK THEN YOU MUST *FIGHT* ME FOR IT. SSS.

Return it to me. Now.

SSS. SSO. AS THE CHALLENGED, I CHOOSE THE BATTLEFIELD.

I ASSERT *REALITY*.

A challenge? I do not know if I am strong enough. I truly do not know.

Very well. Yes, I challenge you, Choronzon.

HELLFIRE

SSS. WELCOME, LADIES 'N' GENNELMEN, TO ANOTHER *THRILL-PACKED* EVENING OF *FUNFUNFUN* HERE AT THE *HELLFIRE CLUB*.

I AM YOUR HOST, *CHORONZON*, HIGH DUKE OF THE EIGHTH CIRCLE, CAPTAIN OF THE HORDE OF LORD BEELZEBUB.

TONIGHT, FOR YOUR *ENTERTAINMENT* AND--SSS-DELECTATION...

A FORMAL CHALLENGE.

AS THE *CHALLENGED*, I SET THE METER AND TAKE FIRST MOVE.

AND THE CHALLENGER IS *DREAM*, ONCE THE MASTER OF THE REALM OF SLEEP...

SSSO LET'S HAVE A *BIG HAND* FOR-- *MISTER SANDMAN!*

UHHH

JOE

It has been long since I was forced to play such games with Demons.

I rise slowly, approach the stage.

Around me a soft susurrus of sound, and a languorous, ironic applause.

"The Hellfire Club." It feels like a bad joke.

And like everything else in Hell, it is deadly serious.

SSSO...

YOU KNOW THE *RULES*, DREAMLORD? IF YOU *WIN*, I WILL RETURN YOUR HELMET.

IF YOU *LOSE*, YOU WILL *SSSERVE* AS A PLAYTHING OF HELL, FOR *ETERNITY*. OUR *SSSLAVE*.

I understand.

"VERY WELL. I HAVE THE FIRST MOVE..."

"My move."

I AM A DIRE WOLF, PREY-STALKING, LETHAL PROWLER.

I am a hunter, horse-mounted, wolf-stabbing.

I smell spilt alcohol, stale smoke and cheap sex, perfume and mold.

And I feel the grass beneath my hooves, the flanks between my legs.

All is real. Nothing is real. Choronzon's move.

I AM A HORSEFLY, HORSE-STINGING, HUNTER-THROWING.

There are many ways to lose the oldest game. Failure of nerve, hesitation...

Being unable to shift into a defensive shape. Lack of imagination.

"I am a spider, fly-consuming, eight legged."

I AM A SNAKE, SPIDER-DEVOURING, POISON-TOOTHED.

I am an ox, snake-crushing, heavy footed.

I feel the snake writhe beneath my hoof, its spine crushed.

I AM AN ANTHRAX, BUTCHER BACTERIUM, WARM-LIFE DESTROYING.

A change in direction, but still an old gambit.

I think...

I think I understand how Choronzon plays. How I can turn it against him.

I think I will abandon the offensive.

I am a world, space-floating, life nurturing.

I AM A NOVA, ALL-EXPLODING...

...PLANET-CREMATING.

I am the Universe--all things encompassing, all life embracing.

I AM ANTI-LIFE, THE BEAST OF JUDGMENT. I AM THE DARK AT THE END OF EVERYTHING. THE END OF UNIVERSES, GODS, WORLDS...

...OF EVERYTHING.

SSS. AND WHAT WILL *YOU* BE *THEN*, DREAMLORD?

I am hope.

SLURP

OH.

THEN I AM... SSS.

I...

I...

I...DON'T KNOW.

WHERE ARE THE TWINS? WHERE ARE AGONY AND ECSTASY?

HELLFIRE

TAKE THIS PATHETIC CREATURE FROM OUR SIGHT.

DEMONSTRATE TO HIM OUR DISPLEASURE.

WE HEAR AND OBEY, LORD.

NO! NOT THISSSS! KING BEELZEBUB, LIEGE LORD-- PROTECT ME! PLEASE!

And it is over.

BBZ. HERE, DREAM MASTER. THISZ ISZ YOUR HELMET. YOU HAVE WON IT FAIRLY.

TAKE IT.

I thank you. The kings of Hell are honorable. I will remember this.

HONORABLE? YOU JOKE, SURELY.

LOOK AROUND YOU, MORPHEUS.

THE MILLION LORDS OF HELL STAND ARRAYED ABOUT YOU.

TELL US WHY WE SHOULD LET YOU LEAVE?

HELMET OR NO, YOU HAVE NO POWER HERE--WHAT POWER HAVE DREAMS IN HELL?

You say I have no power? Perhaps you speak truly...

But--you say that DREAMS have no power here?

Tell me, Lucifer Morningstar...

Ask yourselves, all of you...

What power would HELL have if those here imprisoned were NOT able to DREAM of HEAVEN?

Silently they move aside, unable to meet my gaze.

And walking steadily, my helm by my side, I take my leave of Hell.

My hopes fulfilled.

ONE DAY, MY BROTHERS...

ONE DAY I SHALL DESTROY HIM.

EPILOGUE

HEY--*DEE*, *DES*TINY, WHAT*EVER* YOUR NAME IS!

'FRAID I'VE GOT SOME *BAD NEWS* FOR YOU, GEEK!

ARK HAM ASYLVM

HUNTOON SEZ TO TELL YOU YOUR *MOTHER'S* CROAKED. SHE'S *DEAD*.

SEEMS SHE WANTED YOU TO HAVE THIS. *CATCH!*

CLINK

THANK YOU... MOTHER.

IT'S JUST WHAT I ALWAYS WANTED.

NEXT: *MONSTERS & MIRACLES*

SON OF ULTRON